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## THE MEANING OF CHARITY

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ELIJAH JORDAN

Butler College, Indianapolis, Indiana

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Whatever may have been the philological or linguistic reasons for the change of the familiar text which uses the term "love" for the older term "charity," the differences of a moral and social character in the meanings of the two terms are sufficient to justify the change. The term "charity" has evidently outlived its usefulness, and as a vestigial structure is at present really dangerous to the moral tissue in which it has become imbedded. There are therefore good and valid reasons for the discontinuance of the use of the term in the fact that it has lost all moral or religious significance in becoming corrupted to the purposes of narrowly practical interests. And the corrupted concept has vitiated much thought otherwise significant for social discussion, even though the illegitimate use of the term were unintentional or unconscious. It would not be necessary to postulate a preponderance of vicious purpose in order to argue an almost universal misuse of a supposedly moral term. But the change of terms has not touched the root of the matter. The question is not one which has any necessary relation to the use or misuse of language. It is rather a question of the moral and social bases of the concepts involved, or strictly, a question of the nature of the moral and social relations represented, whatever be the terms employed to represent those relations. The proper way to get at the difficulty is, then, by rigid psychological analysis, in order to discover the fundamental types of consciousness represented, and their moral and social value as determined from their relations within the moral consciousness.

When regarded from this point of view, the type of consciousness behind these concepts represents a human institution—one that has to do with the attainment of an ideal human good, and for this reason properly called either moral or political, as the instinctive accompaniments of the one or the other satisfies better

the requirements of the individual using them. What is this institution? What is its sanction in human affairs? What is its relation to the terms we have here under question? To answer these questions briefly will put the matter squarely before us. With regard to the first question, the institution connected with the charity type of consciousness is that of control. The term "control" is meant to be used in the sense it has assumed in contemporary social discussion; but for the purposes of this paper and to avoid a long process of elimination and to state briefly and positively the meaning of the term, let us say, in general terms, that the idea of control refers to the disposition of human affairs by humanity. If we state the matter thus, it will be easier to avoid the presuppositions and technicalities of the sciences of politics, religion, and sociology, and to restrict the discussion to the grounds of analytic psychology. To put it still more concisely, what we are driving at here is an understanding of the mechanism of human self-control, when that concept is used most broadly as meaning the autonomous act of humanity in directing the processes of its destiny. Nor will it be necessary to regard control as a strictly conscious process, although the determination of its nature will be facilitated by a knowledge of the nature of particular conscious processes in the individual life. As to the meaning of control in human affairs, the problem is a logical one and leads to metaphysical grounds; and the proper statement of the matter would involve the construction of a theory of evolution. If human destiny is a process, then its unaccomplished stages have a meaning for the interpretation of its accomplished stages. The distant future good of man must be at least a proximate and partial good now; that is, the idea of the unaccomplished has a regulative use in the direction of the process of its own accomplishment. This directive force of ideas is, then, the sanction of control in human affairs, and will be regarded as rational and logical in nature or blind and impulsive according as we give predominance in life to knowledge and intelligence or to will and instinct. But this force of ideas is in no sense deliberatively legislative or legal, and there is here no purpose to attempt to establish the "natural" right of civil control. It is perhaps not necessary to assume an absolute

distinction between instinct and reason; in fact, it might be maintained that the severance of the two is just what renders the problem of control so difficult. The consciousness of an event or relation is at one time clear and luminous, at another vague and indistinct, or perhaps almost "unconscious." But we are unfortunately often not clearly conscious of the distinction between those things which we know adequately and those which we know confusedly. And we mistake the one for the other. That is, we accept an unrationalized instinct as the apple of the eye of the reason, and go wrong; not necessarily in practical cases, of course, but inevitably in the case of considerations of the grounds of practice in thought. This circumstance will suggest the answer to the third question proposed above, namely, that the relation of control to charity at least involves the assertion that charity is an instrument in the hands of the larger process of social evolution, and not necessarily therefore a matter of the effects and relations of which we are fully conscious. Our discussion is intended to show that, since charity is an element in a larger partly instinctive process, we are quite generally deceived as to its moral significance.

It seems to make, then, practically no difference whether our concept of charity be interpreted in terms of almsgiving or of love; i.e., whether its basis be material and economic, or subjective and purely spiritual, whether it represent the active and volitional side of our nature, or the passive and contemplative. The result in human affairs is the same in any case. Charity refers to the ideal of a better status for humanity, at least in the minds of persons competent to envisage the concept in the sense indicated above. It refers to humanity as organized and banded together in the interest of a higher destiny, and its common reference to the "lowly" and unfortunate is nothing but the recognition of the unsatisfactory relations that obtain among humanity as at present organized. And the mingled sense of pity with which we perceive the victims of the failure of our best motives to provide a competence for humanity is at bottom a regret that one of our purposes has failed—the purpose to contribute to the commonwealth of human good. The sense of charity is then one of the deepest instincts in human nature, and, being a deep-seated instinct, it is

essential to all social relations, as well as perhaps to all strictly personal purposes—"the greatest of these is charity." It is one of the most important of the instruments through which men hope to attain to the highest of their possibilities, and may therefore be called a means of control.

As a proper means of control in the higher personal life of morality and religion, what is the function of charity? The history of religious literature and of moral theory as well would seem to indicate that man has pretty generally regarded his final purpose as lying in the "beyond," that his utmost good inevitably is to be found outside the present, that his real home is afar off in a sphere where limitations are not what they are in this shut-in vale of tears. All of which means that the immediate awareness of the present status of the self is rarely satisfying. And in those cases where the consciousness of the moment is satisfactory, a very little analysis is sufficient to show that that consciousness is not the consciousness of the larger self—rather the consciousness that is self-satisfactory cannot be the self-consciousness at all; it is a consciousness whose object connotes the satisfactoriness of some remote and accidental organic feeling. We do not find ourselves in feelings of satisfaction, nor in any other immediate fact. Rather we are led indirectly to the discovery of ourselves only through a logical process set in motion by some distractive state the unsatisfactoriness of which is intense enough to goad us into a recognition of the problem involved in an experience being satisfactory or otherwise. Present fact perforce turns our faces toward the beyond. But shall we find the beyond constituted by the same kind of elements as that which drives us to it? It is the allurements of the "other" that prevails upon us to look to the future. But the "other" is not foreign. The present has two characters: its factual, ideally geographical, as it were; and its worthful, its meaning in immediate feeling. The ideal toward which we look lacks the former, except in the higher forms of constructive art; and that is its only difference from the present. There is no "real" difference between the ideal and the real. There is nothing wrong with the fact of life. It is the meaning of this fact with reference to our whole life and the feeling consequent on this relation which renders

it focally conscious, that may be real and right or unreal and wrong. The ideal and the real are in this sense both factual, and their existential characters are not subject to valuation; it is the relation between the two that may take a moral estimate. That the life of the intellect in science should eventually realize the meaning of that relation through the equation of the "mere" fact with the ideal of what the perfect state should be in terms of value, is what we mean by moral evolution; and the limit of the process—that is, a final balance of the moments of the process—is our concept of welfare.

There is, then, nothing wrong with my factual self. What I need is a set of conditions different in some important details from any I have known. This is a set of conditions, as I see it, under which a rational being would experience fact equated with value. It is the familiar life-conditions with the unsatisfactory elements removed. My idea of the good for me is that of myself as relieved from the limitations imposed by my present feeling states—not relieved of the feeling states, but of their lack of qualitative harmony with myself as fact. My enlarged, personal self is the goal of my purposes. It is a sum of cognitions unannexed by feeling, while the incomplete personality of the present is a nexus of feeling.

Charity is the relation, then, between the lowly state of my present more or less impersonal self and that kingdom where my lowly and despised state is lost in the exercise of the princely function of self-legislation unhampered by the limitations of the flesh, which, as feeling states, is, morally, to be regarded as impersonal. The object of charity is then the enlarged self, the I. I envisage myself as I might be and will that I might attain my potentialities. The incommensurability of myself as I am with myself as I can conceive myself to be is the logical ground of the charity relation; and the capacity for conception of this relation is the moral personality. Our analysis has shown that all moral relations are personal; they are all functions of the I. Then charity *must* "begin at home." I am myself the object of any and all charity I can understand; with any other object charity becomes an abstract and quantitative relation. As a moral relation it must remain a

character of the inner self-consciousness. Consequently my interest in the other fellow is secondary and derived. I see that he does not come up to the possibilities that are in him and that he cannot take advantage of the opportunities that lie about him. It is, however, in my attempt to apply my inner disinterested feelings to the other fellow's case that the purity of the charity idea is lost, and my charity becomes as sounding brass and a clanging cymbal. Then charity leads me to the false conclusion that I am my brother's keeper; then the light that is in me has failed. Here again it makes no difference whether charity means loving or giving, feeling or doing—whether it is the will with its consequent deed, or the affection with its quiescent state. A personal relation become objectified is rendered impersonal and therefore non-moral. And in rendering charity to Caesar we are attempting to objectify a personal relation. Nor does it make any difference what is the origin of the state in question, whether a biological instinct or an ideal of worth. When the whole relation is objectified, when we consider the unsatisfactory condition of another as compared with his ideal, we are unable henceforth to keep our thinking free from admixtures of our own purposes. The other fellow's affairs become entangled with mine, and it is my ideal welfare that becomes the object of my thought rather than that of my neighbor whom I began by attempting to help. It is a conscious relation which cannot be completely objectified without losing its real nature.

The disparity between my neighbor's state and what both he and I would regard as his ideal state constitutes for me his need. Now we have seen that when we objectify this relation we reduce it to the cold externality of fact; i.e., we depersonalize it. It is for us no longer the personal relation between self and object, but a relation between objects. But the standard of reference for all things considered as values is the self, and the self involved is the one which I can know, i.e., myself. I am not judging his personality, but that of which I judge is his morality, that is, his relation to his good, and the standard is I. There is no sense in my attempts at description of another's ego, except through the doubtful method of analogy. My neighbor's need is then the index to his moral status, and when I refer it to the personal standard, the need

indicates a state of his which we call lowliness. But from the high ground of the standard the situation means the discovery of superiority for the standard, it assumes uniqueness for the idiosyncratic function of the personality, and all personality that I can know is mine. Contemplation of my neighbor's moral status is highly complimentary to me. It discloses a trait in me in which I excel. His lack is my gain. It is highly comforting to reflect on the misery and lowliness and want of humanity at large, for it gives the sweet assurance that we are not as others; and this fact is probably what makes charity so attractive a "virtue" in modern life. The deep feeling for others' pain is a highly agreeable experience for most of us. And the religious devotee will not for all the world give up the bliss of the agony of tears which he can cause to flow on any and all occasions with no more provocation than the mere presence of the idea of the distressed in body or mind. And the stoniest and stupidest of hearts will with tears most uncharitably read the scriptural strictures on charity with a pleasure that passeth understanding. The poor in spirit are as objects of charity of lesser dignity than the charitable soul that judges them. Their need is a suggestion of the fact that in spirit they do not measure up to the standard of the personality by which they are judged. And what deceives us in charity is the fact that the personality that serves as a standard is the very same personality which does the judging when the need is discovered. The consciousness of another's need is thus a consciousness of a superior dignity as belonging to the self-consciousness. It establishes a unique position for the judger. The object of charity is then pitied, we feel sorry for the one whose want is great. And out of the generosity of our hearts we give him our sympathy, and while our giving is intended to equalize his opportunity with ours, it at least gives us the comfortable assurance of a loftier and worthier status for ourselves. Now the very fact that we argue that in giving sympathy we "bear one another's burdens" and "make each other's burdens lighter" is a proof that the effect wanted is to increase the general status of good or decrease the general weight of burdens. Sharing with the other fellow will tend to distract my attention from my own shortcomings, and thus increase the



warmth of the self-congratulatory feelings; and to get the fullest value, I will have charity for all mankind, will distract myself from my own condition by arguing that all humanity is probably in worse straits. There is comfort in reflecting that it might have been worse. It will at any time serve to center our consciousness, not necessarily upon a worse state, but away from the moment of present unpleasantness. There are abundant psychological reasons why out of the most bigoted and self-centered race-mind the world has known there should spring the religion of universal love and good-will to men.

But it is less than a step from pity to contempt. In fact, the basis of contempt is already contained in pity, and both are indigenous to sympathy. And sympathy is the essence of charity. A very short residence in this vale of tears suffices to carry us beyond the stage of reflective idealizing. In the development of the religion of charity the doctrine of non-resistance and caring not for the things of this world had very soon to be "interpreted." And interpretation flourished until we reach the conception of the church militant and the church triumphant, and the things of this world so fused in the interpretation that in time the church became the richest institution on earth—richest even in the point where moth and rust do corrupt. The early need of the spirit becomes the want of the economic man. And man's want is of the means of life. Nor is the life more abundantly his concern at this point. The earth has been so far "subdued" that he will be happy if he can guarantee for himself even the less abundant necessities of existence. Here we return to the concept of need, and the need is the necessity of existence, not the lack of spirituality. Inevitably then in this world need becomes an economic phenomenon. Our concern is, however, with the psychology of the matter. We have seen that charity leads to a distinction between persons, and it can now be shown that the distinction to which it leads is practically one which has invariably a material ground—economic in the crude sense. We have seen that a disinterested consciousness is always objectless, and that a consciousness with an object clearly defined is impersonal, or, to state it baldly, material. Consciousness of charity for another is then the consciousness of a

depersonalized object, and all impersonal objects are instruments in the hands of the consciousness that knows them. Hence personalized need can only be of and for the self-consciousness, the spiritual life cannot go outside itself for its object; and whatever we know as objects other than our own spiritual inner purposes are objects as instruments, which means that they are material. The other fellow's need is therefore for me a tool, and the object of his need is of the earth earthy.

Difference in dignity between my neighbor and myself thus becomes a question of worth, and worth tends to take always an economic signification. The object of charity we first pity, then despise. Lowliness and unworthiness now mean want of the goods of life, and the goods in this case are the external conditions of life. I am what I have; and because my neighbor has nothing, he has no being except as the mere material out of which through charity I can work out my salvation. The beggar must lie by the wayside—a part of the beneficent constitution of things—in order that I may have the material to prove my spiritual respectability. The poor we have always with us! That the beggar should himself *be* a value or possess worth could not occur to us. He is the imperfection of the flesh, and through his lowliness only can he come into relation to my worthiness; he is the negative condition of my attaining my due. All worth, with reference to charity, is in having.

It is of course neither possible nor necessary to argue that there is no good except economic good. What I wish to insist upon is that in all goods there is this economic aspect, that in everything we call good there is an external and objective reference. That a purely ideal good does not free itself from the immediacy of feeling, and hence cannot take on a generalized signification, seems to follow at once from the universality of the fact that our disinterested concepts tend always toward degeneration when considered with reference to their practical use. It seems that there can be no question of this fact when it is looked at historically or when the data are psychologically analyzed. A concept either becomes "abstract" or assumes the concreteness of immediate feeling. An idea in use becomes either a vague and meaningless

symbol, a "mere form," or it represents a concrete particular. Our doctrines all turn out to be either mystical, dark sayings, or they get a crudely concrete or material significance. It is thus clear that the practical use of ideas seems to involve epistemological degeneracy when their concreteness is assured, or moral unregeneration when their universal value is emphasized. But the point is that all our value ideas show the downward tendency toward economic materiality so long as prominence is given to their external or objective meaning.

The index to the spiritual superiority of the charitable mind is thus his worthiness, which naturally shows the tendency to become vulgarized into mere materialized worth estimated in terms of possessions. We do not here wish of course to go to the length of attempting to show that the necessary connection between spiritual worthiness and material worth is necessarily or even generally recognized by the worthy. But it could easily be shown that it is often thus recognized by reference to many cases in which charity is made use of as a business asset. In fact, the charity which "vaunteth itself" would prove the point. And the unfortunate thing is that we are all often deceived by such charity. We are here concerned to show that the "goodness" of charity, as it actually operates, is to confer upon the giver the consciousness of spiritual respectability and to distinguish him from the subject of his gift by "natural" and impassable limits. Its final meaning is, then, socially, to accomplish the undemocracy of caste—to establish between persons an ineradicable distinction into classes which are in "nature" mutually exclusive. And here it could be shown that the argument of "equality" is made use of to hide the conscious fact that men are divided into classes of different worth. The practical misuse of two moral categories will illustrate this point. I have reference here to the categories of "obligation" and "natural right."

When the Lord made a covenant with Israel the ground was smoothed for a perfect moral relationship. Not that it is desired to give a supernatural sanction for either morality or for contracts—there is no more a supernatural sanction for a contract, even a moral one, than for anything else, economic individualism to the

contrary notwithstanding—nor is a contract as usually understood necessarily representative of a moral relation. In fact, the contract often covers a multitude of moral evils, and is perhaps most often either immoral or merely negatively or restrictively moral. But the covenant with Israel represents the mutuality of obligation. The question is not whether the “party of the other part” has performed his function so as to guarantee my right; the only question that can arise is whether each party has met the obligation which his nature imposes upon him, and the question can occur only to the person who feels the obligation. Israel could not know a breach of obligation on the part of the Lord, and the Lord would not be concerned with a breach of obligation in Israel, whatever he might be able abstractly to “know” about it. That is, the obligation of another cannot be the object of moral concern for me. Israel’s sin is not a sin against God but a sin against the ideally perfect Israel. All I can know with reference to my contracts is a faithful performance or failure in proper performance on the part of the other person. And the performance of function is only indicatively or symbolically moral. But the real knowledge of obligation can only be of *my* obligation, which is disinterested and objectless, therefore personal. And all obligation is personal—as known it cannot be the expression of the other person’s personality, which is self-cognitive only and requires no object. I cannot thus know another’s obligation, and morality dictates that I cultivate my own vineyard. The other’s obligation is known only to himself, as mine is known only to me; it is the idiosyncrasy of the personality. The only relation between two personalities from the point of view of knowledge is one based upon logical analogy. It is an epistemological relation and is *only* known, that is, has no other being than that defined in and by cognition. God himself cannot then immediately and objectively know my obligation.

Now the corollary to the proposition that obligation is personal is that all personalities must be assumed equal; not in the quantitative sense that they are interchangeable, but in the sense that they are equal “before the law” in that each embodies or is the law. If they are not objectively known, they cannot be distin-

guished. The characteristic of the personality is not a distinction, even though personalities might differ in their unique functions of obligation. This is the ground of democracy with reference to social and political relations, and of "brotherhood" in the sphere of religion. But it follows further that in a brotherhood of moral personalities there is no place whatever for any distinction of "lowly" and "worthy," and hence no place for charity or any other concept which rests on inequality of individuals. Inevitably, then, charity vaunteth itself and is puffed up, for its only excuse for being is to mark a distinction that rests on no real difference, to give to the one who exercises it a place distinguished from the common herd. Far from being a "natural" character of man, it is the most clearly and materially artificial. It represents the first step toward man's fallen state. It is man's first self-deception, his first difference from God. Would we dispense with "love" and charity as fundamental religious virtues? The divine love is merely a recognition and an appreciation of the equipotentiality of all personalities and is a moral phenomenon with no peculiarly religious connotation. There being no "depraved by nature," there is no need or excuse for terms representing differences of dignity that do not exist. We are of course talking about the abstract love as represented in charity. Biological or natural instinct has no point in common with what passes as religious love, in spite of the fact that it is often confused with it. The concept of eternal righteousness, as the Jew would have it, or, as the Greek would say, universal justice, is the highest concept attained in moral experience, and what is not contained in that idea is subject to the moral degeneration which all practical concepts sooner or later show.

What is the moral experience which must take the place of what is designated charity? The fact that charity represents a universal human trait furnishes all the justification that any idea needs or can have. But its universality does not preclude that it is and must be universally misunderstood. The fact that charity is universal assures it a meaning, and the question is naturally, What is that meaning? There may be two aspects distinguished

in all meanings. First, there is the meaning for the inner personality of the consciousness for which a value exists. This we can define as the consciousness of identity with the personality of some object of cognition. It may be called obligation when obligation is understood as the unique meaning of the self-consciousness. It is peculiarly personal, the only "free" act of the personality, the act of cognition which gives self-knowledge. In the second place, there is the outer, objectified aspect of the self-consciousness, the consciousness set up as the standard of values. The proper designation of this objectified obligation is justice; but it must be hastily added that justice does not refer to any particular relation among individuals, but is the standard of judgment for those relations. Being the measure of such relations, it is not identifiable with any of them. It is the law of personal relationships as obligation is the ideal of the synthesis of those relationships. Each is an aspect of the autonomy of the personality, and between the two they exhaust the theory of morality and dictate what morality shall be practically. No moral person can therefore desire charity; in the state whose citizenry is composed of persons even God's mercy can find no place. Whoever asks clemency admits his guilt, he asks the coward's terms. The recognition of charity in its usual meaning precludes the possibility of any morality.

The charity attitude then negates morality in the recognition of distinctions of worth. Its final effect (and its unconscious purpose) is to perpetuate those distinctions in the interest of the "worthy." This it does through appealing to the instrumentality of the idea of natural right. It must be conceded at the outstart that some positive theory of natural right is indispensable. But it need not be perverted. As a moral personality I am free; but freedom gets interpreted as freedom from the necessity of recognizing obligation as being the law of my nature. And this comes to mean practically that, as a person of superior worth, even when worth is crudely interpreted in material terms, I have no obligation. Those who do not possess worth are bound, limited; and if I choose to loose their bonds, the act merely replaces the bond of natural conditions with a bond of gratitude to me. I have taken

the place of natural conditions, and my influence over the needy assumes the naturalness that inhered in his previous condition. Gratitude on his part is thus my right, and the right is natural—guaranteed in the constitution of things. Obligation becomes objectified, transferred from my personality to a quality which I recognize as of value (to me) in others, and is made proportional to the extent in which the needy person is dependent upon me materially. All obligation is thus on the side of the other fellow, and since I have the means to his freedom the obligation is due to me. He becomes my slave and the slavery is right and necessary in the constitution of things. Responsibility rests only upon him; I am free and my will is his law.

Thus we see that charity in its practical application tends to lead to the abandonment of all morality. In the social order it becomes a justification of slavery through economic means. In religion it leads to a bigoted paternal self-righteousness and to the finality of external authority. It would seem to have no function in any system of morality that can justify itself to thought. It leads to a distinction of persons in which any difference which carries any kind of power over others is justified in "nature," and finally adopts the point of view of heteronomy of will in the case of the person in need. And the acknowledgment of the externality of law is fatal to all morality. Hence if I adopt the charity point of view, any power I may have becomes a right, and good can then be accomplished only through my will. My neighbor's need establishes my right over him. My wealth makes him my servant; my intelligence makes him the instrument of my purposes; my spirituality makes him my protégé; my vice makes him my victim. In short, I am my brother's keeper; and under the influence of this fallacy the ideal of human brotherhood is indefinitely postponed.